(d) if so, what steps are contemplated by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) Does not arise.

(d) Does not arise.

Remark by Indonesian Food Minister against Hindus

1327. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that Hindus in the land of Bali have strongly opposed an insulting remark by Indonesian Food Minister against the Hindu minorities in the country; and

(b) if so, what steps Government have taken in this regards?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Yes. A large number of Hindus held rallies and demonstrations in Bali, protesting against Mr. A.M. Saefuddin, the Indonesian State Minister for Food and Horticulture, demanding that he should either step down or be sacked by the President. Mr. Saefuddin had earlier made a statement that he had a better chance than Ms. Megawati Sukarnoputri, of becoming the next President of Indonesia as Ms. Megawati was a Hindu and it was unlikely that a predominantly muslim country like Indonesia would accept her as President. Mr. Saefuddin belongs to the United Democratic Party and is known to have Presidential ambitions. Ms. Megawati, leader of a faction of Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), recently held a very successful congress in Bali in October 1998 and is being viewed as a strong contender for the post of President in the next elections likely to be held next year. Mr. Saefuddin subsequently apologised for his statement.

(b) The Government of India is of the opinion that Mr. Saefuddin's remarks targetting Ms. Megawati were apparently made in the context of domestic politics in Indonesia and as such it does not warrant any intervention with the Indonesian government.

Commercial and Economic Department of Indian High Commission in London

1328. SHRI KRISHNA KUMAR BIRLA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Indian High Commission in London has a Commercial and Economic Department;

(b) if so, what are its functions; and

(c) what, according to assessment, if any, are its achievements in the matter of assisting the Indian exporters in the promotion of their trade in the British market and vice-versa?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) The main function of the Economic and Commercial Wing of the High Commission of India, London, is to promote India's economic and commercial interest in the UK. This, *inter-alia*, includes promoting Indian exports in the British market, encouraging investments from the UK and facilitating industrial and technical collaborations between the India and British commercial organisations. In addition, the Economic and Commercial Wing has also been attempting to build and promote an India Brand Equity, both in terms of the country and specific products.

(c) The Economic and Commercial Wing has provided assistance to Indian

exporters by monitoring opportunities, making relevant information available, organising various trade promotion events, facilitating participation in trade fairs and assisting in the resolution of trade disputes. It has also been active in disseminating information to British trade and industry with regard to business and investment opportunities available in India. The efforts of Economic and Commercial Wing have, *inter-alia*, been responsible for Indian exports to the UK growing from Rs. 2121 Crores in 1990-91 to Rs. 7578 Crores in 1997-98; an increase of over 250%. During the same period, the British exports to India rose from Rs. 2963 Crores to Rs. 8696 Crores, an increase of over 190%.

Proposal to remove Kashmir issue from agenda of UN

1329. SHRI SANJAY NIRUPAM: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether there was a proposal to remove the Kashmir issue from the agenda of U.N. (General Assembly and Security Council) in 1997;

(b) whether, similarly, a proposal was mooted to withdraw U.N. observers from line of actual control between India and Pakistan and close down their offices in New Delhi and Islamabad; and

(c) if so, why these proposals could not be taken up?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) Jammu and Kashmir is not on the agenda of the UN General Assembly; the question of its withdrawal from the agenda does not, therefore, arise. There was no proposal in 1997 to remove Kashmir from the agenda of the Security Council.

(b) No proposal was mooted by the Security Council in 1997 to withdraw UNMOGIP or to close down its offices in New Delhi and Islamabad.

(c) Question does not arise.

Policy on External Cultural Relations

1330. DR. C. NARAYANA REDDY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any definite policy has been formulated by Government relating to India's external cultural relations;

(b) if so, whether a copy of the policy document has been laid on the Table of the House; and

(c) if not, whether Government contemplate to formulate such a policy in view of imperative need for specific guidelines on the subject of external cultural relations?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHARA RAJE): (a) the Government have established the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in April 1950 to participate in the formulation and implementation of the following policies and programmes relating to India's External Cultural Relations:

(i) To foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries.

(ii) To promote cultural exchanges with other countries and peoples.

(iii) To establish and develop relations with national and international organizations in the field of culture.

(iv) To take such measures as may be required to further these objectives.

(b) and (c) The subject of External Cultrual Relations has regularly formed a part of policy statements on foreign policy made by the Government on the Floor of the House from time to time.